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ISAIAH XLV. 18, 19.

לֹא תָהו בְרָאָה לְשִׁבַת יִצְרָאָה

THE usual translation of the above words from Isa. xlv. 18 is: "he created it not a waste, he formed it to be inhabited." Taken by itself, no exception can be taken to the idea conveyed by this sentence, and, as far as I am aware, all commentators understood the words in this sense. God's object in creating the earth was not to produce a waste, but he meant it to be a place on which the human race should develop, and expand, and fulfil the destination assigned to it.

But on looking at the context, the phrase seems to be out of keeping with the tenor of the immediately preceding, and the immediately following exhortations. The whole of the expostulation contained in the verses between xliv. 5 and xlvi. 11 is directed against the senselessness of worshipping gods made by the hands of man, the utter helplessness of these gods and their impotency of doing anything for themselves. Man not only had to make them, but must continually nurse and tend them, and the inert blocks are, for all that, believed to be the creators of those who created them and everything else. The prophet points to the Universe and all it contains, and, by contrasting the true Creator and Supporter of everything with those torpid masses of matter, to the utter insanity of those who worship the latter. This is the tenor of the unparalleled exposure of those who make their gods, which commences xliv. 5. The prophet constantly points out that it is God, and God only, who has created and formed everything. "I, God, and no one else, and nothing else, could do all that." After some special applications of the theme to Israel and its history, it is again taken up with renewed vigour in xlv. 5. The prophet does not tire of pressing that truth upon the people, at the same time showing the utter imbecility of assuming clay vessels to be the creators of the potters who made them (xlv. 9), the helplessness of the made creators who collapse if not held up by those who made them (xlv. 20; xlvi. 1-3, 7), whereas the eternal God

needs no support, but himself made everything, and bears everything (xlvi. 4). This is also expressed in our verse, xlv. 18 : "For thus says the Lord that created the heavens; he is God that formed the earth and made it, he established it. . . . I am the Lord and there is no one else." In the midst of the admonition as to God's sole authorship of all that exists, a new idea is introduced by the parenthesis : "He created it not to be waste (or, *in vain*), he formed it to be inhabited"; and the uniform tenor of the address is broken.

I therefore consider the word **תְהוֹ** not as an apposition to the object (it, namely, the earth), but to be the subject to the verbs **בָרָא** and **יָצַר**, and the negation **לֹא** to apply to both verbs. By the word **תְהוֹ** are designated those inert and impotent masses of matter which, people imagine, did all these things, and the verse ought to be translated : "For thus says the Lord that created the heavens, he is God ; that formed the earth and made it, he established it. It is not the vain (idol) that created it, that formed it for habitation, it is I, God, and no one else."

There is no difficulty in the word **תְהוֹ** being used to denote idols. They are called **הָרוֹהַ אֲשֶׁר לَا יִזְעַלֵּי** in 1 Sam. xii. 21 (ci **אַחֲרֵי** **הָרוֹהַ** **אֲשֶׁר** **לَا** **יִזְעַלֵּי**) and **וְלֹא יִצְיַלֵּוּ** **כִּי** **תְהוֹ** **הַמָּה** **בְּטוֹחַ** **עַל** **תְהוֹ**. Isaiah says in the same exhortation (xliv. 9) **יָצַרְתִּי** **פָסָל** **כָּלְם** **תְהוֹ**, and lix. 4 he uses the word as a noun :

I feel also inclined to take the word **תְהוֹ** in the next verse (xlv. 19), in the same sense, as an apposition to the object **בְקָשָׁנוּ** in **נִי**, and opposed to **צְדָקָה** and **מִשְׁרָאִים** at the end of the verse. It brings out vividly the contrast between God and **תְהוֹ**, indicated in the preceding verse.

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